Worship Space

and the Christian Assembly

Part I: Worship, Worship Space, and Mission

Worship is spatial

Principle S-1

Worship and worship space are linked in a vital relationship.

Background S-1A

The first Christians spoke of their communal shelter and worship space as the "house of the church" (*domus ecclesiae).* Family dwellings became venues for worship not only because of persecutions but also because of theological convictions. Early Christian tradition spoke of the gathered assembly in relation to its place: "It is not a place that is called 'church,' nor a house made of stones and earth. . . . What then is the church? It is the holy assembly of those who live in righteousness."[93] Over the centuries, the building itself became identified as *church,* yet the assembly remains the primary expression of the church.

Application S-1B

A worshiping community is renewed by an informed examination of the patterns and actions of liturgy, the naming of that assembly's expression of the liturgy, and an understanding of the relationship of worship to the arts that participate in it. This journey of discovery can assist the community in the imaginative use of an existing space, the renovation of a current space, or the construction of a new space for worship.

[93] *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus,* trans. Burton Scott Easton (Ann Arbor: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

Space expresses faith and serves mission

Principle S-2

The place of worship expresses the church's faith and serves God's mission.

Various spaces serve a common pattern of worship

Principle S-3

Spaces used for worship vary from place to place and from culture to culture, accommodating a common liturgical pattern.

Background S-3A

Many churches today are reaffirming a basic liturgical pattern for the primary weekly assembly that was shaped in the early centuries of the church and renewed during the Reformation era.

> Sunday is the primary day on which the Church assembles: the first day of creation when God transformed darkness into light and the day on which Christ rose from death and revealed himself to the disciples in the scriptures and the breaking of bread. The baptized gather to hear the word, to pray for those in need, to offer thanks to God for the gift of salvation, to receive the bread of life and the cup of blessing, and to be renewed for the daily witness of faith, hope, and love.[94]

Background S-3B

A recent study on worship and culture suggests that worship relates dynamically to culture in four ways. It is *transcultural*, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. It is *contextual*, varying according to the local situation (both natural and cultural). It is *countercultural*, challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture. Finally, it is *cross-cultural*, making possible sharing between different local cultures.[95]

Application S-3C

Because the Spirit has spoken and continues to speak to Christian assemblies in all times and places, worship spaces are planned and created to express common norms within the local culture and community. Affirmation of locality is balanced, however, by countercultural commitments to justice, stewardship, and the integrity of design, materials, and appointments. Embracing artistic and architectural styles from a variety of cultures enriches worship and encourages a broader experience of the church catholic.

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[94] *With One Voice*, 8.

[95] "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," in *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996), 1.3. See the introduction to this volume, pp. viii-x, for a fuller summary of this document.

Sacred worship creates sacred space

Principle S-4

The body of Christ gathered in prayer hallows the space used for worship.

Background S-4A

The scriptures speak of the people of God as "living stones . . . built into a spiritual house."[96] Gathered to Christ, the cornerstone precious in God's sight, the worshiping assembly is a place where God makes a home. Christ's presence is promised not under certain architectural forms but where two or three are gathered in his name.[97]

Background S-4B

For the first three centuries, Christians generally rejected the religious architecture of the day. They did not accept the dividing line between sacred and secular; the whole world was a place to encounter God. Rather than otherworldly places for worship they found the presence of God expressed in the awesome "this world-ness" of Christ's presence.

Background S-4C

The arts serve the worshiping assembly

Principle S-5

Art and architecture proclaim the gospel, enrich the assembly's participation in the word and sacraments, and reinforce the themes of the occasion and season. Liturgical art animates the life and faith of the community.

Background S-5A

"Music, the visual arts, and the environment of our worship spaces embody the proclamation of the Word. . . ."[98] "The visual arts and the spaces for worship assist the congregation to participate in worship, to focus on the essentials, and to embody the Gospel."[99]

Application S-5B

When an art form participates in the liturgical action, it becomes an instrument of proclamation rather than decoration or ornamentation. Liturgical art reinforces and articulates the themes of the liturgy. Through rhythm, sound, smell, form, texture, color, and light, liturgical art is a powerful language that speaks to all the human senses.

Background S-5C

The Spirit of Christ has spoken and continues to speak through a variety of voices: individual and communal, past and present. Worship spaces use architectural styles evocative of specific times and cultures. Architecture as a living art explores new forms of expression, construction techniques, and building materials. Form and style constantly change as architecture seeks more effective ways to facilitate a faith community's worship needs.

Application S-5D

Sensitive and appropriate use of ethnic or cultural artistic forms that are not indigenous to the setting in which they are employed can open avenues of communion and ministry.

Application S-5E

The balance between everchanging styles and enduring values is an ongoing challenge for planners of the house of the church. This creative tension calls for deliberate efforts to express the timeless in a timely fashion.

[98] *The Use of the Means of Grace*, principle 11 (see appendix).
[99] *The Use of the Means of Grace*, application 11B (see appendix).

Application S-5F

Some expressions of art, addressing themes related to the whole of Christian liturgy, may be permanent or infrequently changing. Other artistic expressions have temporary application to occasional rites or specific seasons of the liturgical year. The preparation of a space to celebrate the seasons of the church year begins with the study of liturgical texts and readings. Artists, amateur and professional, are encouraged to collaborate with worship leaders and seasonal planning teams so that their work is focused on the assembly and its worship.

Worship space witnesses to justice

Principle S-6

Worship space witnesses to the gospel in ways that challenge destructive patterns within society and affirm justice, peace, and the integrity of God's creation.

Application S-6A

The concern for social justice and the building of beautiful structures need not be opposing values. All human beings long for an experience of beauty that leads to worship. The creation of a beautiful place need not be determined by how much it costs. A community with limited resources may have a greater need for a beautiful worship space than a congregation of substantial economic means. Beauty can be expressed with quality materials that are used with integrity and are appropriate to a given space.

Application S-6B

Decisions relating to architecture, design, construction materials, and ongoing maintenance can be made with environmental sensitivity and a foundation of good stewardship.

Application S-6C

The way a building relates to an environment or neighborhood is a sign of a community's attitude. Buildings can be welcoming or foreboding, inviting or imposing. A worship space that welcomes and accommodates other activities such as concerts, lectures, and dramas reveals a stewardship of resources and commitment to the greater community.

Application S-6D

One common meaning of the term sanctuary is a place of protection and refuge. A liturgical space may serve a congregation and the larger community as a place of safety and refreshment, accessible for prayer and meditation, at times other than when the whole assembly gathers.

Application S-6E

Worship space that reflects intentional consideration of the diversity of culture and ethnic background within the congregation and its surrounding community is one way of expressing a commitment to social justice.

Part II: Areas of Liturgical Action

There are liturgical centers within the worship space

Principle S-7

The assembly space includes primary centers for the celebration of the word of God and the sacraments, secondary areas that facilitate the roles of all the leaders, and other spaces that complement the requirements of communal worship.

Background S-7A

The foundational symbol of the church is the gathered assembly itself, which transcends

Background S-7D

An order for the Dedication of a Church Building[102] suggests a procession from threshold doors to font, pulpit, altar-table, and then into the midst of the people, thus identifying the focal points of a worship space. At each place a blessing is said, and ritual acts including touching water in the font, placing a Bible or lectionary, and vesting the altar may accompany this liturgy.

Application S-7E

Each piece of liturgical furniture and area of liturgical action has its own character and requirements. Worship is enhanced when all furnishings taken together possess a unity and harmony with each other and with the architecture of the room and when the craft and imagination of the artist are reflected in the quality of these furnishings.

[102] *Occasional Services,* 166-171.

The place of baptism proclaims our faith

Principle S-8

The place and the practices of baptism proclaim the church's faith. A generous space around flowing water reinforces the meaning of baptism for the assembly.

Background S-8A

Although baptism has always been central in Lutheran theology, in practice it has not always been accorded a central place in liturgy or liturgical spaces. Often fonts are small and placed in remote locations. A contribution of the ecumenical liturgical movement has been to emphasize Holy Baptism as a consequential sign of faith for adults and children.

Application S-8B

Access to the font affirms the communal nature of baptism. When the place of baptism is near the main entrance, the understanding of baptism as the sacrament of Christian birth and as commissioning for ministry is reinforced. Wherever the font is located, it serves its role best when it is visible and there is sufficient space for gathering around it. At times, children in the assembly may be invited to gather closest to the baptismal group.

Application S-8C

The most critical sign of baptism is the water itself. The rich biblical understanding of baptism as bath,[103] as new birth,[104] and as burial and resurrection with Christ[105] is best expressed when abundant water is used. Where a font large enough to permit adults and children to enter the water is unavailable, one large enough to allow pouring with abundant water is an alternative. Non-porous flooring beneath and surrounding the font accommodates the generous use of water at baptism.

Application S-8D

Keeping the font filled with fresh or flowing water at all times, and not only when baptisms are scheduled, enables the faithful continually to affirm their baptism by sight, sound, and touch. A permanent baptismal place may enable the continuous flow of fresh water to the font.

[103] 1 Corinthians 6:11.
[104] John 3:5.
[105] Romans 6:3-5.

Application S-8E

Usually located near the font, a paschal candle is a preeminent symbol of the light of Christ, used to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ especially during the Easter season and at baptisms and funerals.

Background S-8F

In scripture and Christian tradition, anointing with oil has been an important sign in rites of baptism, healing, and times of passage. In the rite of baptism, oil has been used in association with the laying of hands as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit and of sealing the faith.

Application S-8G

The growing appreciation of the use of oil in rites of baptism and healing suggests the usefulness of a place in close proximity to the baptismal font where anointing oil may be kept and possibly displayed to view.

The table of Christ is set

Principle S-10

The table of our Lord Jesus Christ is set in the midst of the assembly.

Background S-10A

Before and after his passion, Jesus shared meals with disciples and others as a sign of the kingdom. The eucharistic altar has taken many shapes throughout Christian history. Designs that suggest a table for dining have been used to reinforce the nature of the eucharist as meal.

Application S-10B

The altar is the holy table of the Christian family. Carefully crafted of worthy, solid material, its size and shape are proportionate to the size and shape of the worship space. The mensa or top of the table accommodates the bread and wine of the eucharist and those who minister around it. The table itself is the primary symbol, making secondary symbolism unnecessary. The altar can be vested with a white cloth (fair linen) and paraments that complement its shape.

Application S-10C

The meal is prepared and the table is set for the baptized people of God. The goals of easy access and a sense of gathering around the table suggest a careful reexamination of the place and use of altar rails.

Application S-10D

The altar is the common table of the assembly. It has a central role in the liturgy but need not be spatially centered. Because the altar-table is not the only liturgical focus of the room but parallels other centers in importance, an offcenter arrangement may be suitable in some contexts.

Worship leaders have a place

Principle S-11

The worship space includes designated spaces for worship leaders. The place for presiding and assisting ministers is distinct, but not overly separated or elevated.

Background S-11A

A significant liturgical space in synagogue worship is the place of elders who are responsible for presiding at the worship service. When Jesus preached at the synagogue in Nazareth, after reading from the Isaiah scroll, "he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down."[108] From the chair of the leader, he then preached his brief but powerful sermon.

Background S-11B

The concept of a presider's chair for the bishop *(cathedra)* developed from one use of the Roman civil basilica, in which the chair was the place for the judge or representative of the royalty. The presider was seated in the chair, which was located in the center of the apse and surrounded by other benches for the bishop's presbyters, and the assembly stood. A similar practice is still retained in some civic courtrooms, where the judge is seated as people stand.

Background S-11C

Many churches, especially in various Protestant traditions, reflect a wide variety of approaches and some ambivalence in the matter of seating liturgical leaders. The idea of an ecclesiastical throne is questioned. At the other end of the spectrum, in some places the commonality of people and ministers is expressed by having leaders sit among the people.

Application S-11D

Even though there is reason to stress the oneness of the assembly and its leaders, the roles and functions of leaders call for designated places for leaders that are somewhat separate and clearly visible.

[108] Luke 4:20-21.

Musical leaders have a place

Principle S-12

Providing adequate areas for choirs and instrumentalists allows them to function effectively as worship leaders.

Background S-12A

Musical leaders and musical groups often need to be shaped into ensembles. The organ, piano, and other accompanying instruments typically need to be close to choirs, cantors, and other musical leaders.

Application S-12B

Places designated for instruments and musical leaders facilitate their roles in animating the assembly's worship without overshadowing the visual centers of word and sacrament or impeding the ritual action of the assembly. When the place for leading music resembles a stage, musicians may be perceived primarily as performers. Judicious placement of voices and instruments helps to ensure that the making of music is an offering within the liturgy.

Application S-12C

When musical leaders have an integral place within the main assembly space, rather than being separated in a balcony or transept, the sense of the unity of the assembly may be heightened and congregational song strengthened. Planners should consider configurations that enable musical leaders to be seen and heard without obscuring the primary symbols of ambo, table, and font. Flexible seating and flat floors are conducive to various spatial arrangements.

Application S-12D

Acoustics for worship are designed primarily to encourage the common voice of the assembly. Sound needs to mix and move in the assembly. Lively acoustical spaces are most often fostered by hard, reflective surfaces and a limited use of carpeting or other absorbent material.

The gathering place welcomes and sends forth

Principle S-13

The gathering place (commons or narthex) is a significant transitional space between church and world. The gathering space builds a sense of community, facilitates hospitality, and sends forth the assembly into the world. It may also serve as a starting place for processions.

Application S-13A

The physical environment outside the place of worship contributes to gathering and preparing the community for worship. Intentionally configured parking areas, entries, and exits, as well as areas set apart for seating and conversation, welcome newcomers and provide a hospitable path for the whole assembly from and to the world. Landscaping, gardens, and surrounding areas are part of the structure and of the community's welcome to worship.

Application S-13B

A generous and functional gathering place (sometimes called the commons or narthex) facilitates welcome and hospitality. The gathering place provides opportunity both to strengthen the congregation's own sense of community and to invite visitors into the as-

Many rites shape worship spaces

Principle S-14

The entire ritual life of the congregation contributes to the shape of worship spaces.

Application S-14A

The recovery of the fullness of Holy Baptism has resulted in the recovery of the powerful liturgies of Holy Week and the Three Days *(*Triduum*).* The planning of worship spaces takes into account the spatial requirements for celebrating these liturgies. Dramatic read-

Background S-14E

"The bread and wine of communion are handled with care and reverence, out of a sense of the value both of what has been set apart by the Word as a bearer of Christ and of God's good creation. . . . Congregations provide for communion of the sick, homebound, and imprisoned."[109]

Application S-14F

Congregations that provide communion for those who are absent may need a worthy cabinet (ambry) for temporary storage of the elements, located in the sacristy or another suitable place.

Media serves liturgy

Principle S-15

The use of electronic media and technology in a worship space presents both opportunities and challenges for the church's worship.

Application S-15A

The use of audiovisual elements in worship requires careful consideration. Such media are desirable when they enhance rather than replace essential congregational action. Their function of assisting the assembly's participation in worship through the visual arts may include providing the color and form of seasonal artwork. Because of the many ramifications of the use of this technology in worship, careful integration must be assured. Technological equipment (sound boards, light systems, microphones, speakers, cameras, projectors, video screens) is most effective when it does not impair liturgical movement, obscure primary symbols (meal, preaching, baptism), or adversely affect the design of the space and its worship. Sound reinforcement, when necessary, is held in careful balance with natural acoustics. The effective use of media and technology often calls for particular skills and training.

Application S-15B

Media and technology can also assist in overcoming physical limitations, aid sight for the visually impaired, and augment sound for the hearing impaired, facilitating everyone's full participation.

Cross, clothing, and vessels contribute to proclamation

Principle S-16

The visual arts and forms of media embody and support the proclamation of the word

Background S-16E

Crosses, icons, and other symbols have been visual signs of Christian identity and faith. Their use has occasioned significant debate and division throughout history. Some Christian traditions have continued using symbols inherited through the ages. Other churches have moved in the direction of spaces devoid of traditional symbols. The church continues to assess the use of symbols in liturgical spaces to discern their meaning theologically, pastorally, and aesthetically.

Application S-16F

When Christians identify symbols that organize their common worship life, the most important visual elements in a worship space are the assembly itself, bread and wine, water, and the book of the scriptures. The cross is central to our understanding of the faith and has an important presence in the assembly. Icons, paintings, and sculpture have a place in the assembly space when they enhance corporate worship and individual devotion.

Background S-16G

The use of flags in our churches received impetus in the early twentieth century when Christians in America wanted to stress their loyalty to this country. A sense of patriotism sometimes leads to the desire to display and honor flags in public places.

Application S-16H

Flags signal national loyalties and may become divisive, implying that a particular national identity is synonymous with the Christian way. Flags, while appropriate in other parts of the church complex and as part of certain national occasions, have no permanent place in the primary Christian worship center.

Part III: Marks of the Worship Environment

Worship space is hospitable

Principle S-17

A hospitable worship space generously accommodates the assembly, its liturgy, and a broad range of activities appropriate to the life of the congregation and its surrounding community.

Application S-17A
Beyond its functional nature, a hospitable space is inviting because of the harmony of its materials, the scale of its proportions, and the integral nature of its parts. Excellent lighting and acoustics, space for liturgical interaction, absence of barriers, and well-crafted furnishings all contribute to hospitality. A hospitable room is not only a good place to worship, it is a good place to be.

Application S-17B
Christian hospitality is reflected in the attention a community gives to making its space physically accessible and welcoming to persons of all ages and abilities. The worship space is life-affirming and promotes physical health and safety as well as mental and spiritual wholeness, honoring the human need for sustenance.

Application S-17C
An understanding of the physical and experiential needs of children contributes to the design of liturgy and liturgical spaces that are inviting to all.

Application S-17D
Christian hospitality is culturally inclusive and recognizes the rich diversity of God's people in dimensions such as gender, race, age, class, ethnic background, and ability. Giving attention to this diversity within the worship space invites the participation of all within the community and speaks to the unity of the body of Christ.

Background S-17E

The synagogue was not only a place for worship but also a place for study and commu-

Beauty opens the assembly to God

Principle S-20

In the worship space, beauty is a portal to the mystery of God and a witness to Christian faith and truth. Beauty is revealed through the honest use of the materials of God's creation.

Background S-20A

Studies in anthropology and comparative religion indicate that people find beauty and mystery in archetypes such as stones, mountains, trees, sky, water, and earth. These elements signal for many people the presence of a creator God and provide an oasis where people can measure their lives against profound patterns of creation. "From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator."[110]

Application S-20B

Furniture made of sturdy and beautiful wood, stone or wood sculptures, fabric hangings made of natural fibers, living water and plants, natural light, a loaf of bread, wine, fragrant oil, candles of wax, and the beauty of human forms lead people to an experience of wonder and inspiration that in turn opens them to the mystery of God.

Background S-20C

"Art chosen for the place of worship is not simply something pretty or well made, an addition to make the ordinary more pleasant. . . . Rather, artworks truly belong in the church when they are worthy of the place of worship and when they enhance the liturgical, devotional, and contemplative prayer they are inspired to serve."[111]

Application S-20D

While definitions of beauty vary according to personal or cultural tastes, it is possible to identify some helpful criteria, such as balance and scale, color scheme, and quality materials honestly crafted.

Application S-20E

Original, commissioned artwork can reflect the worship life of a particular congregation. Artists can be nurtured and encouraged in their communities by the incorporation of their art in the worship life of the church.

[110] Wisdom of Solomon 13:5.
[111] *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 29.

Part IV: Renewal of Worship Space and the Community

Liturgical design is an act of prayer

Principle S-21

The process of building a worship space or reordering existing space is itself an act of faith and worship.

Application S-21A

A community of faith is strengthened when planning for the renewal or creation of worship space is intentional and deliberate. Planning includes ample time for education, reflection, experimentation, and research. Congregations benefit from periods of reflection and prayer in what is commonly seen as an educational and administrative enterprise. In prayer they seek the direction and revelation of God in order to shape a vision for the future.

Application S-21B

Preparation to build or renew worship space is strengthened when the community of faith wrestles with the basic theological concepts that have shaped its history and form its current mission and ministry. It is theological conviction, rather than architectural theory, that is the driving force in shaping a house for the church. As part of any building process, a program of congregational education may well explore the meaning and practices of worship, the theological premise behind those practices, and the elements of spatial expression.

The design process involves the whole community

Principle S-22

The whole community of faith is involved in the process of designing and creating a new or renewed worship space.

Application S-22A
Effective planning decisions are made by those who possess the trust and support of the community. Those entrusted with this leadership role reflect the diversity of the congregation and are sufficient in number to establish a common vision. To mark that trust and support the congregation may commission these leaders.

Application S-22B
Visiting and experiencing the liturgy in other places of worship is valuable for all who are engaged in the process of designing liturgical spaces.

Application S-22C
Active dialogue within the congregation enriches the design process and helps to ensure its success. Such conversation leads the community to understand and appreciate the design directions that are undertaken.

Specialists are partners in renewal

Principle S-23

People with training and experience in creating liturgical space are essential partners in renewed use of existing spaces and in new construction projects.

Background S-23A
Liturgical consultants, liturgical designers, architects, engineers, artists, and craftspeople are resource people who can facilitate the work of a congregation. Each has special expertise and a role to play in the process of creating and renewing worship spaces.

Background S-23B
A liturgical consultant enables the community of faith to articulate its theological and liturgical vision and to realize the impact on the environment of worship. The consultant is a teacher of the congregation and those involved in the planning process. The consultant's role enables the architect to set the design process in a solid theological framework. The liturgical consultant has a vital role to play in ensuring that the many voices within the community are heard, and at the same time helping those in the process maintain clear theological vision.

Application S-23C
The work of designers and artisans begins with the worshiping community and is informed in dialogue with the worshiping community.

Application S-23D
The employment of skilled and inspired professionals safeguards not only the material value of design and form, but also the emotional and spiritual resources of the community.

Building is a matter of stewardship

Principle S-24

Choices in its use of money, property, and other resources reflect a community's commitment to service and ministry.

Application S-24A

In selecting building materials, engineering systems, and liturgical appointments, careful consideration for the impact on the environment, the depletion of limited resources, the safety of manufacturing, and the health effects on the building inhabitants will help ensure a place for worship that is life-affirming.

Application S-24B

An understanding of value will ensure the appropriate use of resources and talents in the creation of worship spaces. Value is the appropriate investment of resources into the architecture, furnishings, technology, and liturgical artwork to insure durability, longevity, quality, and significance.

Application S-24C

The responsible creation of a worship space may involve the creative reuse or reconfiguration of building space or furnishings to conserve the treasures of that congregation. Identifying what is worthy of preservation and how to carry out such adaptation is best addressed early in the planning process.

Renewal of spaces encourages renewal of people

Principle S-25

The renewal of a space for worship is an opportunity for the renewal of a worshiping community.

Application S-25A

Building, renovation, and even limited but imaginative renewal projects represent significant experiences in the life of a congregation. From vision to blueprint to implementation, the process is an opportunity for congregational growth in faith and life.

Application S-25B

The journey to understand liturgy, ritual, and liturgical art enriches a community's faith and worship. Even congregations of limited means can undertake modest reordering of their worship space, especially with the assistance of skilled volunteers.